

Imagine the fear

Fear lurks around every corner for victims of stalking. A piece of mail, a car following too closely, the ring of the doorbell or even a phone call can compound their terror. Imagine the amount of energy required to try hiding from someone who stalks you 24 hours a day. Victims suffer tremendously because of the constant fear, anxiety and disruption of their lives.

Most often, stalking occurs...

in the context of domestic violence. The majority of stalking victims are women who are placed in fear by those they once loved and trusted — former spouses or boy/girlfriends. Batterers often stalk their former partners in an attempt to force them into resuming a relationship or to punish them for leaving.

Statistics show...

- Approximately 80% of stalking cases involve women stalked by former male partners. (Privacy Rights Clearinghouse, University of San Diego Center for Public Interest Law. San Diego, CA, 1996.)
- As many as 90% of women murdered by current or former male partners were stalked prior to their deaths. (Bernstein, S.E. *Living Under Siege: Do Stalking Laws Protect Domestic Violence Victims?* *Cardozo Law Review*, Vol. 15, 1993.)

Stalking is a crime...

that can threaten anyone without regard to age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, mental or physical ability and religious background. Stalking is intentional behavior that includes:

- **repeatedly following a person** (e.g. on foot or by vehicle)
- **repeatedly attempting to contact the person** (e.g. by mail/phone)
- **repeatedly harassing the person** (e.g. phone calls, hang-up calls, sending unwanted “gifts”)
- **repeatedly intimidating the person** (e.g. watching the person from outside her home or workplace)

Anti-stalking laws...

attempt to halt a stalker’s deliberate, obsessive, predatory and terroristic conduct before it becomes deadly. California passed the nation’s first anti-stalking statute in 1991. Since then, all states have enacted similar laws.

The PA Law...

took effect June 23, 1993, and defines the crime of stalking as a series of acts **intended**:

- to place a person in **reasonable fear** of bodily injury
and/or
- to cause **substantial emotional distress** to the person

Stalking charges...

can be filed by the victim, police or district attorney. PA’s stalking law provides strong criminal penalties:

- At a minimum, **stalking is a first degree misdemeanor**, punishable by up to five years in prison.
- **Stalking becomes a third degree felony**, with a maximum sentence of seven years, when the stalker has prior convictions of one or more violence-related offenses against the same victim or members of her family or household.
- Stalkers can also be charged with a third degree felony if they have been **convicted of stalking before**, even with a different victim.

Protection From Abuse (PFA) orders...

can be obtained against stalkers in most domestic violence situations. Judges can prohibit stalking in PFA orders even if victims do not present evidence of stalking at that time.

When the orders do not specifically identify stalking, batterers may still be in violation of “no contact” PFA orders by engaging in stalking behavior. (*Local domestic violence programs can provide assistance in filing PFA petitions.*)

continued...

Safety planning...

can provide some personal protection for victims of stalking. Safety tips include:

Personal security

- Park close to the entrance of your home.
- Vary daily schedule and routes taken to work, school and stores.
- Accompany children to and from school bus stops.
- Remove residential address and phone number from checks.
- Destroy discarded mail.
- Make sure your phone number is unlisted *and* unpublished.
- Trace harassing phone calls with "Call Trace" (*57 on a touch tone phone or 1157 on a rotary phone) *immediately* after receiving one.
- Be aware of Caller ID and "block" your phone lines so your name and/or number cannot be revealed when placing calls.
- Use an answering machine to screen calls.
- Use a private mailbox (through a company such as Mail Boxes Etc.) for your official mailing address, which ensures more privacy than a post office box.

Workplace security

- Have co-workers screen calls, visitors and incoming mail.
- Provide co-workers (managers, security) with a photo or description of the stalker and any possible vehicles.
- Coordinate with co-workers when leaving the workplace; never leave the building alone, especially at night.

Vehicle security

- Park in well-lit public areas.
- Keep doors locked, even when car is in use.
- Equip car with a locking hood and gas cap.
- Stay alert and be familiar with locations where you can get help if you are followed (e.g. police/fire stations).

Home security

- Keep doors and windows locked.
- Change the locks, if possible, and install deadbolts.
- Keep lights and a radio/TV on at all times.
- Maintain a functioning smoke detector and fire extinguisher.
- Inform trusted neighbors/apartment managers of your situation. Provide them with a photo or description of the stalker and any possible vehicles.
- Identify visitors before opening doors.
- Arrange a signal with neighbors, such as turning a porch light on and off, as an alert to call the police.

Stalkers can be extremely dangerous...

and any threats or contact that demonstrate stalking should be treated seriously. Each incident should be thoroughly documented, including the date, time, location and all words and actions of the stalker.

Help is available through your local domestic violence program.

For more information...

call your local domestic violence program or the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV) at (800) 932-4632. To get the phone number of your local program:

- 1) look in your telephone book's blue pages under Abuse/Assault
- 2) call directory assistance
- 3) call PCADV

A local program staff member or volunteer can provide additional information about available services, volunteer opportunities and ways you can help prevent the crime of domestic violence in your community.



Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence

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